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ABSTRACT

Magnet schools are developed according to a "center of excellence" concept that combines a basic academic program and a specialty enrichment program. Each magnet is unique and it is this uniqueness that is, ideally, able to attract students from across school boundary lines, blending economic classes and races while meeting the varied needs of students who choose to attend. Magnet schools are for the student who has identified and wishes to seriously pursue a particular talent or career interest in a professional setting or in a setting that allows the student's uniqueness to be more fully nurtured. In Dallas, Houston, and other cities, magnet schools are a part of the court-adopted desegregation orders, indicating that both the courts and the cities involved believe that magnet schools can become a means for voluntary desegregation. In spite of their good beginnings and enthusiastic reception by students and parents, magnet schools face two crucial problems--finance and certification. (Author/IRT)

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OSSC BULLETIN

MAGNET SCHOOLS WHAT ARE THEY? WHERE ARE THEY GOING?

by

Gail Grafflin Fullington

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FOREWARD

There are many evidences of a continuing interest in magnet school programs today. Educators are aware of the fact that it is not enough just to talk about individual differences in students. It is being recognized that differing educational programs will be required to meet the differences that exist in individual student learning styles. Parents also are demanding unique educational opportunities that will prove particularly attractive to the special interests of their children.

The author, Gail Fullington, recently was a doctoral student in Educational Administration at the University of Oregon. Currently she is serving as Staff Associate on the Council of the Great City Schools in Washington, D.C. She recently gave a major presentation on this topic at the First International Conference on Magnet Schools in Dallas, Texas in March, 1977. Her study served as the basis for this publication.

Readers will also find pertinent implications for comprehensive schools in this Bulletin on magnet school programs.

Kenneth A. Erickson
Executive Secretary
Oregon School Study Council

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MAGNET SCHOOLS: WHAT ARE THEY? WHERE ARE THEY GOING?

. . . every human individual possesses constructive and socially desirable capabilities which can be developed through appropriate experiences in environments which are conducive to learning and expression . . . educational institutions, and society as a whole, are to be judged by the extent to which they establish and maintain the conditions for optimum development of all members and the free exercise of the developed powers for the enhancement of self and others.

Francis S. Chase and Marjorie Buchanan

Introduction

The history of education in America is continually marked by redefinitions of schooling and of school structure in response to societal demands. Several such redefinitions are occurring in this decade, among them the recent emphasis on magnet schools. Experiments with redefined schooling as well as accompanying research on student learning indicate that, contrary to earlier thought, there is no "one best system" enabling students to learn or teachers to teach (Tyack, 1974). "It is increasingly clear that persistent reassertion of 'the one best system' simply will not do" (Sizer, 1976). Students do, in fact, learn equally well in a variety of ways and in a variety of settings (OSSC, 1974).

With the knowledge that students learn in various settings and with the increasingly complex demands of society, education must become a process of matching parents' demands and students' learning styles with schooling structures or alternatives which meet those demands and

styles. The time is near when educators will be concerned with operating a "brokerage service," a "consumer guide" to assist students and parents in selecting the learning alternatives which will best meet students', parents', and society's needs. Many districts already offer such services, among them such diverse systems as Eugene, Oregon, and Cincinnati, Ohio.

A magnet school is one kind of alternative oriented toward a specific interest area (OSSC). The term "magnet school"* describes "[a] school or education center that offers a special curriculum capable of attracting substantial numbers of students of different racial backgrounds" (Education U. S. A., 1976). Magnets are developed according to a "center of excellence" concept combining basic academic programs and a specialty enrichment program (Brandstetter and Foster, 1976). Each magnet offering is intended to be unique, and it is that uniqueness which is, ideally, able to attract students from across school boundary lines, blending economic classes and races while it meets the varied needs of students who choose to attend. It is its potential for blending races and economic levels that has made the magnet school appealing to urban districts dissatisfied with busing as a means to achieve racial balance; it is the ability to choose a unique curriculum that school officials hope will make magnet schools appealing to students and their parents as alternative schools.

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*While the author recognizes that magnet schools can exist at all grade levels, they are more prevalent as secondary schools. For the purpose of this study, the term "magnet school" will refer to a secondary school.

Magnet Schools: Historical Precedents

The magnet school concept is not a new one. Historically, parents and students as well as professional educators have sought choices outside those offered by traditional schooling, choices that allow for developing "specific interest areas" among students as well as choices that meet a variety of society's needs. As early as the mid-1800s, reaction to the Boston Latin Grammar School's rather narrow and elitist curriculum led to demands for more accessible high schools. Created to prepare boys for Harvard, the Boston school's purpose was to produce an elite clergy. Clearly, it was not meant for everyone, and there was no other place for those not allowed to attend it to go (Elliott, 1905).

Dissatisfaction with the Boston Latin Grammar School's limited curriculum and admissions policies led to the Academy Movement of the mid-1800s, an attempt to counter the "limited curriculum and exclusively college-preparatory ends" of the Latin Grammar School, which was viewed as "wholly inadequate for the needs of the youth of the land" (Cubberley, 1919). Disillusionment with the uniformity of the Academy curriculum, however, soon resulted in the creation of differentiated programs within existing high schools as well as in separately established high schools. It was this differentiation that formed the precedent for today's magnet schools. Cubberley notes that after 1880 several new subjects and several parallel four-year courses were introduced into the high schools, including the classical courses offered before but adding such "innovations" as the "scientific course, the business course, the manual arts course," and others of a similar

nature. These were not simply separate classes which students could choose to attend, then blend into the total student body for what we now call "core curriculum" classes. These were separate, tracked courses of study in specific interest areas which separated students throughout the school day.

Perhaps the more easily identifiable precedents for the magnet school were the manual arts/industrial training schools of the late 1800s and early 1900s. Looming industrialization caused the high school's capacity to prepare students for industrial careers to be questioned, leading to demands for business and manual training out of a concern that:

> [f]or the most part . . . high schools were not providing technical skills for industry and commerce; in fact, they were accused by critics of being hopelessly out of joint with the times in that they provided allegedly useless studies (Krug, 1964).

Butler's Educational Review hailed the manual arts movement as a "forward step," proclaiming that manual training was most successful when "isolated in a building specially prepared for the purpose" and "conducted by specially trained teachers" (Krug). While critics of the movement, like Dean E. A. Birge of the University of Wisconsin, argued that separate schools were undemocratic and "distinctly for the working people," the "stage" was clearly set for the creation of special purpose schools separate from the regular or more traditional high schools. Although the manual training movement continued, it was overshadowed in the early 1900s by the movement for more industrial/vocational training.

With schools like the Dallas, Texas, Skyline Career Development Center and the Philadelphia Parkway Program, specific career education interest areas--including vocational/industrial training but not limited to such training, in a specialized setting with specially trained teachers where students could choose to attend from across school boundary lines--reached their peak in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Skyline, with its specialized and highly sophisticated curriculum and facility offerings, attracted students from every high school attendance area in the Dallas Independent School District to its career clusters, ranging from aeronautics (complete with hangar and planes) to television (complete with studio and closed-circuit broadcast facilities).

What the early Academies, manual training courses, industrial/vocational education, Skyline and Parkway programs have in common with today's magnet schools is that all represent interest area choices for parents and students beyond what is termed the "traditional" high school curriculum; "alternatives," if you will, that attract students on the basis of interest and on the basis of desire to participate in the specialized programs offered rather than on the basis of residence in a school attendance area.

Magnet Schools and Desegregation

Since the Brown v. Board of Education decisions in 1954 and 1955, school districts have sought viable means to achieve desegregation. City school systems are particularly seeking alternatives to busing, prevalent since Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenberg in 1971. To city school

systems devastated by busing, magnet schools may provide part of the answer to the problem of achieving racial balance while recognizing segregated housing patterns that are not likely to change for many more years. By offering specialized and unique curriculum, magnet schools hope to attract students of all races and economic levels to attend on a voluntary basis, making busing to achieve racial balance unnecessary.

In Dallas, Houston, and other cities, magnet schools are a part of court-adopted desegregation orders, indicating that both the courts and the cities involved believe that magnet schools can become a means for voluntary desegregation. Increasingly, statements of national educational policy focus on magnet schools as an alternative to busing.

Mario Fantini believes "the courts are accepting magnet school programs because judges feel that specialized schools offering concentrated curricula . . . will draw a racially and economically mixed student body without having to mandate busing" (Education U. S. A.). A provision of ESAA calls for the spending of $25 million in 1977, $50 million in 1978, for planning and operating magnet schools and "neutral site" schools, or for pairing schools with colleges or business concerns.

In Tasby v. Estes (1976), Judge William M. Taylor, Jr., states that:

> The most realistic, feasible, and effective method for eliminating remaining vestiges of a dual system on the 9-12 level, and for providing equal educational opportunity without regard to race, is the institution of magnet schools throughout the DISD [Dallas Independent School District].

National interest in magnet schools is increasing, as evidenced by increased ESAA funding for magnet schools, congressional interest in promoting magnet schools, and other support at the national policy-making level. The 1976 Democratic Party Platform contains a statement of "support for incentive programs to achieve integrated education--among them, the magnet school concept." The Council of the Great City Schools, an organization of twenty-eight of the country's largest urban districts, adopted as a part of its 1976 policy platform a statement favoring "federal and state incentives for developing creative approaches to desegregation and integration, such as magnet and specialty schools."

Whether the magnet school will prove to be the solution to school desegregation that its proponents hope is not yet known. Certainly, there is room for creative, viable solutions to the desegregation dilemma, and, just as clearly, those solutions have not yet been proven. Perhaps the magnet school concept will prove to be one kind of solution.

As important as the magnet school's function in desegregation appears, however, that function can be successful only as the major function of the school--providing unique, specialized curriculum choices in special interest areas for students--is successful. Unless students choose to attend, magnet schools will not succeed.

Magnet Schools as Alternatives

The number of alternative school programs in America has grown dramatically. " . . . [A] recent [1973] estimate puts the total figure

for alternative elementary and secondary schools at more than 3,000, and one projection indicates that there will be close to 20,000 such schools in operation by 1976" (NASSP, 1973). Reasons for the rapid growth of alternative programs are varied. At least one group of researchers feels that the most importnat contribution and a major reason for its rapid growth is the element of choice that alternative education offers the community. Parents and students are more loyal and committed to schools they choose; teachers are happier with students who are in their classes by choice. Through such a system of choice, education's consumers can control the market. "This open market creates a healthy feedback from the consumer to the professional educator" (Smith, Burke, and Barr, 1975). Because of this feedback, alternative schools are more responsive to community needs. Because they are more responsive to community needs, alternative schools receive more community support and feedback.

Dunn and Dunn (1974) argue that while student choice is important, educators must make more of an effort to assist in "matching" the learning situation with the learner so that there is maximum "fit" between the student's learning style and the learning setting. The authors outline learning style characteristics for several kinds of educational programs.

In the process of alternative education, educational goals are neither subverted nor abandoned. "[A]lternative public education means diversifying the means to common ends" (Fantini, 1973).

> The system of public schools of choice . . . assumes that the parties closest to the action—parents and students as

> consumers, and teachers and administrators as professionals--should have the right to make choices from legitimate alternatives (Fantini, 1970).

Alternative schools--including magnet schools--give students and their parents choices about the kinds of curriculum, setting, and teaching in which they participate. Indeed, the success of magnet schools depends on their ability to provide choices that are attractive and to assist students and parents in making those choices. Abramson (1975) states that the goal of educational alternatives is "to match child, material, and methodology on an individualized basis." He argues that truly student-centered education is reached through alternatives. "If education is to be centered on something, it must be centered on the child, not the method."

In describing Philadelphia's Parkway Program, which began in 1969 and which has served as a model for change in secondary education since, Finkelstein (1976) states that the program began:

> . . . determined to show that . . . while traditional schools were valid and working for many students, these schools did not provide sufficient options for an increasing number of turned-off, tuned-out young people.

Chase and Buchanan (1977) report that:

> . . . a number of students, who have not previously enjoyed much academic success, are finding themselves in the new environments [magnet schools] and developing stronger self-concepts . . . [A] number of these students . . . now exhibit high capabilities for leadership and a will to overcome deficiencies in learning skills.

But alternatives and magnets are not just for "turned-off, tuned-out" young people.

> The aim of participation in our society is to promote individual choice. In an open society that values the individual,

> making choices from among various options of public education ought to be the right of every individual (Fantini, 1970).

Fantini asserts that public education can no longer be viewed as the kind of "one best system" Tyack describes. Instead, it must be seen as providing a range of options for a diverse population, with numerous means to achieve common goals.

> The standard school is certainly one alternative to quality education. However, it is no longer a suitable alternative for growing numbers of teachers, parents, and students who need different kinds of programs now (Fantini, 1970).

Previously, the student knew "that there [was] only one path--and he must either accept it and adjust to it or perish" (Fantini, 1970). Today, it is recognized that there are many paths and that students and their parents can choose from among them.

In their study of magnet schools, Chase and Buchanan report high student morale in most curriculum areas. Because they've made free choices, the students feel self-determination, motivation, and responsibility for their choices and respond with commitment to the school and its goals. In one magnet school, for example, "[e]xpensive equipment is left unguarded, but vandalism and theft have not resulted. The sense of community and a common value system have established pride in the school and a belief in its objectives."

It is the element of choice, then, that holds the answer to success or failure for magnet schools. As alternatives, magnets must offer the specific interest areas that attract students. Unless these interest areas attract students of diverse ethnic and economic levels, the usefulness of the magnet school concept to voluntary desegregation

and integration of urban school districts is threatened.

Why Do Students Choose Magnet Schools? Four Case Studies

Why do students choose magnet schools? Why do they leave their home schools and neighborhoods to travel sometimes several miles, by choice? What do they find when they get there? Do parents support their children's choices?

This study does not claim to have statistically quantifiable data to answer these questions. What it presents is students' and parents' own answers, in their own words, in the case studies which follow. To secure material for the cases, the author visited the magnet schools in Dallas, Texas, and interviewed students and their parents in order to attempt to view magnet schools through students' and parents' eyes.

Case 1: Carla

Carla is sixteen. She was a sophomore last year in her home high school. Bright, articulate, and outgoing, Carla has always been interested in science. At her home high school, Carla completed the only chemistry and biology courses that were offered there and has decided that she wants a career in medicine, although just what that career will be she isn't sure yet.

Carla's parents share her enthusiasm for medicine as a career, but they can't afford to give her the tutoring or private school courses that might carry her beyond the knowledge she has gained from courses at her home high school. For Carla and her parents, the Health

Professions Center, one of Dallas' magnet schools, seemed the answer.

Enrolling as a part-time student in the fall of 1976, Carla plans to become a full-time student in the Health Professions Center for the remainder of her high school career.

Why?

"My teachers at the other school were good, and they taught me a lot," Carla feels, "but my teachers here are real doctors and nurses, and I get to work in a real hospital with real patients. My old biology classroom can't beat that!"

Many of Carla's medical preparatory courses are taught by licensed physicians, nurses, and other professionals in a facility that provides modern, professional laboratories and equipment. Since the Health Professions Center is located adjacent to Baylor Hospital, it is easy for Carla to enrich her classroom learning by volunteering in the hospital two afternoons a week after school. Next year, Carla hopes to work part-time at Baylor, after school and on weekends, gaining valuable, on-the-job experience to supplement her studies as well as earning money for college or medical school.

While Carla and her parents feel that it is still too early for her to identify a particular medical career, they feel that the experience Carla is gaining now will help her make a more intelligent choice later. "She's getting so much experience in so many fields," says her mother, "that it is giving her a chance to look at those fields first-hand, so that when it's time for her to decide what she really wants to do, she'll know--and she won't have to guess whether it's what she

wants, and find out too late that it isn't."

Has she missed her friends and the life of her old high school? "Yes, I miss some of my friends," Carla admits. "But I still see them when I'm back at my other school the rest of the day. And next year, when I'm here full time, I'll still see them after school and on weekends. Besides, some of my friends have decided that they'll try the magnet school next year, since I like it so well. And I've made new friends, too, that have the same interests as I do."

These interests include preparatory training in several medical careers—office personnel, practicing medicine, medical technology, physical therapy, pharmacy, nursing, X-ray technology, and veterinary medicine. They include dentistry, as well: practicing dentistry, dental hygiene, oral surgery, and dental technology.

Carla's friends in other programs, like Carla, are instructed by licensed physicians, dentists, technologists, nurses, and other professionals in modern, professionally equipped laboratories and with the opportunity to observe and work in real-life clinical settings under the supervision of their instructors. Some of the top medical personnel in the city serve on the advisory committee of the center, supervising the curriculum and the students' work experiences. And when Carla and her friends are ready for jobs or for more advanced training, the skills they've learned at the Health Professions Center will make them highly employable and excellent candidates for the country's top pre-medical and pre-dental schools.

Would she choose the Health Professions Center if she had the

choice again?

"Sure, I would," answers Carla. "Only sooner."

Cases 2 and 3: Tony and Andrea

Tony is seventeen, and a junior. He's been interested in music "for as long as I can remember," and played trumpet in the high school band at his home high school. Although his academic grades are not spectacular ("I'd rather get with some of my friends and jam for a couple of hours than study, any day!" he admits), Tony manages to maintain average grades.

Jazz is Tony's special interest, and he can tell you about every great jazz musician who ever lived. His ambition is to play professionally in a jazz group, and his instructors at the Creative Arts Academy, another of Dallas' magnet schools, feel that he has not only the talent but the determination, as well, to realize his career goal.

"Oh, I'd played in the band in my old school, but I'd done about all I could do there. Besides, a lot of the other kids looked at me like I was crazy when I said I wanted to play jazz--they're only into rock. And I like rock, too, but jazz is what I REALLY like!" Tony says.

It was with reluctance that Tony's parents agreed to allow him to transfer to the new school. "He was so involved at his old school--with the band there and all--that we were afraid he wouldn't be happy, that he'd miss all the activity he was used to," said Tony's dad.

"Sure, I miss all that," responded Tony, "but one of my teachers from the other school came here to teach and I've made several new friends. It was worth it."

Tony's program includes not only intensive training on his chosen instrument but also advanced instruction in composition, interpretation, improvisation, arranging, and conducting. As a member of the performing jazz ensemble at the magnet school, Tony has the opportunity to perform publicly in the kind of group he wants to belong to as a professional some day.

In addition to music, Tony's classmates at the Creative Arts Academy receive intensive instruction by professionals from the performing arts and visual arts communities in Dallas in dance, theatre arts, and the visual arts--sculpture, painting, weaving, jewelry design, and other areas.

Housed in one of the city's oldest school buildings, the Creative Arts Academy is able to make unique use of the full proscenium, the huge backstage area, the courtyard, high ceilings, and wide hallways so characteristic of older buildings. Winding, wide stairways have become canvases for murals created and designed by students; the high-ceilinged and windowed third-floor room that once housed the study hall has become a ballet studio; wide sections of hallways have become open-area sketch workshops; the large, open courtyard has become an outdoor theatre. The building's transformation from a drab, old building into a unique arts facility is itself a tribute to the talents of the established artists who teach there and the budding artists who study there.

Walking through the dance classrooms is like walking through the quarters of a professional repertory company. One sees intense young men and women working with professional ballet and modern dance teachers

in professionally equipped rehearsal and performance halls as they learn the rudiments of time, shape, color, and rhythm.

In addition to the dance and music programs, the theatre arts program gives students a chance to study all aspects of the theatre: acting, scenery construction, set design, makeup, sound, lighting, costume design and construction. All productions at the Academy--instrumental music, dance, theatre, or vocal music--are produced by students who use their training to handle production details as well as on occasion to direct and design the productions. In the process, the young artists learn respect and appreciation for each other's talents.

Andrea, another of Tony's classmates at the Academy, is a sophomore student in the visual arts program. Her special interest is sculpture. "I've always been interested in art," she says, "and it seems like I've been fooling around with clay for as long as I can remember." Andrea had planned to attend Dallas' Skyline Career Development Center, but when she heard about the Creative Arts Academy, she decided to give it a try, instead.

"These magnet schools are the best thing Dallas has come up with," she feels. Although she expresses some concerns about her academic program, she remains enthusiastic about her art experiences. "They really let you do what you're interested in, and try it out. In a normal art course, you don't get to try very much--I mean, in sculpture, you get a little lump of clay and you maybe make a figure or a pinch pot or something. They just can't offer anything like this."

"This" means intensive training in form, color, composition, and

abstraction, plus expression in various visual mediums as well as the medium of the student's choice, so that students like Andrea learn to understand the interrelationships among the different mediums at the same time they are concentrating on their own.

As do the other magnet schools in Dallas, the Creative Arts Academy utilizes the expertise of professionals in the community who advise, teach, demonstrate, and critique--as well as employ--the young artists who study there.

Careers open to graduates of the Academy include composing, conducting, performing, apparel sales and design, sculpture, jewelry design, jewelry making and marketing, printmaking, and pottery.

"The teachers here have a more personal relationship with students," Tony feels. "It's like we're equal, like we're all performers, you know? I like that."

Apparently, the other students at the Academy "like that," too--it is Dallas' most successful magnet school, with over 300 full-time and 760 part-time students who, like Andrea and Tony, have found a way to continue their academic educations while enhancing their talents and preparing for artistic careers.

Case 4: Kathy

Kathy looks more like a recently employed high school graduate than a student in her junior year. Kathy attends the Business and Management Center, another of the magnet schools in the Dallas Independent School District, and although she was enrolled in secretarial training courses in her old high school, Kathy chose to transfer to

the Business and Management Center for several reasons.

For one, after graduation she thinks she'll have a better chance to land the kind of job she wants as a legal secretary. "Eventually, I might want to go to law school, but I don't know yet," she says.

The Business and Management Center is located in the oldest high school building in Dallas, the school that was once removed from the central business district but is now on prime downtown property, enabling students to work part-time in downtown office settings. And the proximity to the central business and professional area of the city allows business and professional leaders to participate more easily as valuable additions to the regular professional staff.

Kathy's classmates are training for careers in business, management, marketing, insurance, real estate, investment, accounting, computer science, merchandising, and clerical work. They are able to work part-time among the business and professional leaders of the city, some of whom are also their teachers and advisors.

Problems Facing Magnet Schools

In spite of their good beginnings and enthusiastic reception by students and parents, magnet schools face two crucial problems: finance and certification. Costs involved in establishing a magnet school program prohibit many school districts from doing so, districts which both need and desire such programs. The Emergency School Aid Act has appropriated $25 million in 1977 for magnet schools, an amount that, although not sufficient to meet program needs, does represent the beginning of

federal funding support for magnet schools. Means which will allow magnet schools to pay for themselves or which will allow increased federal funding must be sought.

Certification rules in many states prohibit the use of state funds for the salaries of professionals who are not certified as teachers. Alternatives must be developed to present certification requirements which will allow the salaries of non-certificated professionals who teach in magnet schools to be paid with state funds rather than exclusively with local funds.

Magnet Schools: Are They for Everyone?

Magnet schools clearly are not for everyone, just as their more traditional counterparts are clearly not for everyone.

Magnet schools are for the student who has identified and wishes seriously to pursue a particular talent or career interest in a professional setting or in a setting which allows the student's uniqueness to be more fully nurtured.

What Carla, Tony, Andrea, and Kathy have in common with other students in Dallas' magnet high schools is that they are studying in settings which resemble traditional secondary education only from the outside of the building. Inside those buildings, they have found facilities, equipment, personnel, and opportunities that none could have attained in their home high schools. And by choosing those opportunities, they have voluntarily desegregated their city's schools.

They, their parents, and their city like what they've found.

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